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ABSTRACT

The Child and Family Neighborhood Program, located in a suburb of Detroit, is an early childhood intervention project aimed at strengthening informal and formal family support systems and increasing parents' knowledge of child development. The program works with clusters of 10 parents and their young children (0-3 years) twice weekly in a home-like setting with paraprofessionals as the primary staff persons. Attempts to strengthen family support systems are made by enabling parents to form mutual support systems with other parents in the program, by encouraging parents to maximize use of their social networks for tapping informal resources, and by facilitating utilization of existing formal human services. The program curriculum stresses interpersonal relations and communication as well as ways to approach and deal with formal institutions and services. Efforts to increase parents' understanding of child development emphasize the reciprocal nature of parent-child interaction. Concrete activities and practical discussions are used to provide new information about child care. The program also has a health education and a developmental disabilities screening component. Staff development is a major program activity. The evaluation strategy falls into three areas: program refinement and maintenance, program-parent-child interaction, and parent-child characteristics and change. (JMB)

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A SOCIAL INTERACTIONAL APPROACH TO PARENT EDUCATION: AN OVERVIEW OF THE CHILD AND FAMILY NEIGHBORHOOD PROGRAM

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The Child and Family Neighborhood Program began in 1978 as a special project of The Merrill-Palmer Institute in cooperation with Wayne-Westland Community Schools. The program is formally tied to the preschool and parent education component of Wayne-Westland Schools. Douglas R. Powell is Director; Elizabeth Cromwell, Assistant Director; Christine Boesen, Field Coordinator; Donna Solovey, Evaluation Coordinator.

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A Social Interactional Approach to Parent Education: An Overview of the Child and Family Neighborhood Program

I. Background

Within the past several years the interest in early childhood intervention has begun to shift from a basic concern for whether early intervention is effective to consideration of the determinants of effective intervention and especially the role of the family in early intervention strategies. The positive effect of early education on school performance is now fairly well established. Longitudinal studies of children involved in early education suggest that school achievement and IQ scores are improved through preschool education (Palmer, 1975, 1976; Guinagh & Gordon, 1976; Weikart, Bond & McNeil, 1978; Weikart, Epstein, Schweinhart & Bond, 1978). A follow-up analysis of 14 infant and preschool intervention programs found that low-income children who received early education were better able to meet the minimal requirements of their school than children not receiving early education (Lazar, Hubbell, Murray, Rosche & Royce, 1977).

Growing evidence suggests that early intervention programs which involve parents in a significant way are more effective than programs aimed exclusively at children. A review of longitudinal and intervention research data underscores the significant influence of parents on the behavior and development of their children (Schaefer, 1972), and an analysis of the effects of early intervention programs for children primarily from low-income families suggests that program strategies aimed at both parent and child have more impact than child-centered programs

(Bronfenbrenner, 1974a). A recent comparative study of preschool curricula also found that programs have more impact when parent education is involved (Weikart, Epstein, Schweinhart & Bond, 1978). In addition, an examination of the effects of a number of different parent training programs found the programs to be consistently successful in producing immediate child gains on standardized intelligence tests (Goodson & Hess, 1975). These empirical findings, plus the growing body of evidence surrounding familial influences on academic achievement (e.g. Leichter, 1974), are prompting a renewed focus on parents in early education efforts.

Although parent education has a long and rich history in America, there is little program-based empirical evidence upon which to base parent education program designs. Presently there is in operation a diverse array of parent-focused early intervention programs which represent markedly different approaches and assumptions about the nature of parent-child relations and the determinants of parental behavior. The effects of many of these programs and their specific operational procedures are not known since few parent education efforts contain carefully planned and executed evaluation designs.[1] The current widespread interest in parent-oriented early education far exceeds the existing level of experimental program development activity and knowledge about the effects and operations of different program approaches and models.

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[1] One notable exception is the research-based Parent-Child Development Center program organized by Mary Robinson of the Administration for Children, Youth and Families, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. This program has found positive effects from parent-based infant education (e.g. Andrews, Bache, Blumenthal & Weiner, 1975) and is yielding valuable data about the design and operations of parent education programs for low-income populations.

Designers of parent education programs must make several fundamental decisions when determining specific program strategies and operational plans. First, the primary target(s) of change must be determined. That is, program designers must decide whether certain attributes of parents themselves and/or the socio-ecological contexts in which they function are the determinants of parental behavior and hence an appropriate target(s) of change. The basic question here is what factor or factors affect the ways in which parents rear their children (i.e. child development knowledge and/or adequacy of family support system) that are amenable to change. Second, a decision must be made about the specific program features or approaches that are to be utilized in carrying out program objectives. This decision pertains to the organization of program services and the means by which services are provided.

Target of Change. Historically in this country parent education efforts have fluctuated markedly in their assumptions about the degree to which parental attributes or the society in which children and families function require alteration. For instance, the child study movement of the 1880s disseminated to parents instructional techniques appropriate to children's "natural" needs; in the Progressive Era of 1897-1917 the National Congress of Parents and Teachers (originally the National Congress of Mothers) used parent education as a lever for societal change through political activity supporting measures such as child labor laws, housing codes and pure food and drug acts; and in the 1920s the focus returned to parental knowledge of childrearing, with nursery schools seeking to involve mothers as active participants in and observers of professional care of their children (Schlossman, 1976).

Contemporary parent education programs also demonstrate considerable diversity in suggesting whether it is characteristics of parents, the institutions and agencies upon which children and families are dependent (e.g. schools), the social and political systems in which parents function, or some combination of the aforementioned which affect parental behavior. Gordon (1977, 1978) has analyzed research-based parent education programs within each of these varied approaches and found the empirical evidence suggesting that programs which view attributes of parents (e.g. childrearing knowledge and attitudes) as the primary target of change can be successful. The data are unclear as to the effects of programs seeking to make schools and other agencies responsive to parents. Also there is unclear evidence concerning the effects of parent education programs aimed at changing social and political systems plus schools and other child-related agencies. The lack of concise data may be a function of weaknesses in evaluation methodology as well as difficulty in determining the specific objectives and actual operations of parent education programs. There is convincing theoretical support that parent-oriented programs aimed at changing institutions and political systems are a powerful approach to educational and social change (e.g. Ogbu, 1978).

A determination of the appropriate target(s) of change in parent education programs requires a serious examination of the forces which affect the lives and development of young children. Increasingly there are suggestions that traditional conceptions of the American family -- the primary early childrearing agent -- are not applicable to many families today. Since the early 1800s the concept of families as self-sufficient, autonomous units has been embedded deeply in the moral, economic and political fabric of this country. The traditional conception holds that families need

no outside help, especially from formal institutions, in carrying out their childrearing functions. Many families have been or are unable to fulfill the self-sufficiency ideal, of course. Families are influenced profoundly by social and economic forces, and the ability to obtain independent, autonomous status often is affected by factors over which families have no control. Moreover, increasingly parents must serve as coordinators of their child's life. They must identify, select and coordinate the experts and institutions that help rear their children. Most, if not all, of this coordination is external to the family, underscoring the significant degree to which parents are becoming dependent upon resources and services outside of familial networks for assistance in raising their children (Keniston, 1977).[2]

This reality of family functioning has prompted a number of proposals for policies and program services which seek to strengthen and undergird the childrearing functions of parents. The recent work of the Carnegie Council on Children has led to a series of proposed social policy changes which collectively are based on the premise that the development of children requires programs and policies which support parents (Keniston, 1977). Similarly, Bronfenbrenner (1974b) has suggested that the progressive fragmentation and isolation of the family in its childrearing role requires a strengthening of family support systems so that parents are undergirded in rearing their children. Bronfenbrenner (1974a) concluded from an analysis of research-oriented early intervention programs that there is a need for "ecological intervention in the form of family

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[2] The significance of issues surrounding relations between parents and professionals is heightened as professionals and professionally-staffed services assume a larger role in educating and caring for children. For example, one critical issue is the relationship between parents and nonfamilial caregivers (Powell, 1978a) and the role of parents in making policy decisions concerning child care services (Fein, in press).

support systems" which enable parents to foster their child's development. Schaefer (1976) reached a similar conclusion through a review of research evidence that suggests social stresses and supports may influence the parental care of children.

The apparent strength of family support systems in influencing parental behaviors and the development of children is suggested in findings of a carefully designed study of the effects of three different home-based infant education curricula by Kessen and Fein (1975). It appears from this study that the organization of family life plays an important role in determining maternal behaviors and maternal responsiveness to change agents outside the family milieu. The study found unexpectedly that parents belonging to extensive family networks were more open to change and were more responsive to curriculum interventions than parents with restricted family networks. Kessen and Fein tentatively interpreted the finding as an indication that extensive family networks may provide parents with a secure, stable framework which makes it easier to welcome and utilize new information from persons who are outside the family constellation. This interpretation has crucial implications for the design of parent education programs if indeed a stable parental network of enduring interpersonal ties is a prerequisite to change.

There is additional evidence of a strong interplay between family life ecology and child behavior from research on the correlates of child abuse and on the development of children in single-parent families. Parke (1977) posits a social-psychological theory of child abuse, based on research data, in which cultural sanctioning of violence and lack of community support systems for families are viewed as supporting the development of abusive patterns. For instance, findings of a recent study suggest that the degree to which mothers are subjected to social-emotional stress without adequate support systems accounts for a substantial proportion (36%) of the variance in the rates of child abuse and

and maltreatment (Garbarino, 1976). The role of support systems in single-parent families is emphasized in an important review of research on the development of children in mother-headed households which found that disruptions in the development of children appear to be attributable to a lack of family support systems rather than father absence (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1977).

Program Approaches. The second basic decision which designers of parent education programs must make surrounds specific program features or approaches. The empirical evidence is far from conclusive in identifying effective approaches to working with parents in early childhood intervention efforts. It appears that parent education programs which are highly structured, involve parents for extended time periods, employ goal-specific curricula, and contain projects planned and carried out by parents themselves are likely to have significant impact on parents and their children (Gordon, 1978; Clarke-Stewart, 1977).

The efficacy of these program strategies is more suggestive than it is definitive, however. An analysis by Goodson and Hess (1975) of the effects of 28 programs designed to train parents to prepare their children for school achievement reached the preliminary conclusion that five major features of the intervention programs were modestly related to magnitude of program effectiveness. Program effectiveness was found to be related to the amount of emphasis placed on parent training (greater parent emphasis yielded greater program effects), one-to-one teacher/parent interaction (compared with group instruction), and the degree of structure in parent training activities (more structure, less effectiveness). The study found no relationship between the content of the curriculum used by parents and the magnitude of impact on children. It also found no relationship between the degree of specificity in instructing parents and program effectiveness. While

the analysis found the programs to be successful in terms of achievement score gains, the study concluded tentatively that the five program features did not account for the very large differences among effects of different programs.

What emerges from the Goodson and Hess analysis of parent education programs is that it is easier to produce effects in intervention programs than it is to identify the specific factors which contribute to success. This interpretation is similar to the findings of other analyses of the effects of preschool and infant intervention programs (Lazar, et al., 1977; Levitt & Cohen, 1975; Miller & Dyer, 1976; Weikart, 1969; Weikert, Epstein, Schweinhart & Bond, 1978). For instance, the curriculum comparison studies conducted by Weikert and his colleagues (1978) suggest that the particular activities employed in any curriculum are not as important as the way a curriculum is implemented by its staff. Weikart, et al. (1978) conclude that the principal issue in early childhood education is not which curriculum to use but how to manage any curriculum to achieve positive results.[3] Perhaps this conclusion may be applied to parent education curricula as well.

To summarize briefly, what seems to be emerging in the early intervention field is a strong interest in, if not a trend toward, indirect intervention through parent education. But, as we have seen, there are several critical issues in the design and delivery of parent education programs. One issue deals with the appropriate target of change in parent education efforts. For example, should programs attempt to alter

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[3] In a comparison of three major preschool curriculum models, Weikart, et al. (1978) found all were effective but none was more effective than another. The investigators are careful to indicate, however, that even though it appears that any well delivered curriculum will lead to improved performance on measures of aptitude and achievement in school, this does not imply varying curricula will lead to other identical ends. Longitudinal study with highly sensitive research instruments is needed to understand the process and long-term outcomes of different curricula.

the childrearing attitudes and knowledge of parents and/or the conditions under which parents attempt to rear children? There is theoretical support and growing empirical evidence to suggest that parent education programs should give considerable attention to the role of family support systems in undergirding the childrearing functions of parents. A second issue is that of the effects of different program features or approaches. Simply stated, we know generally that well-administered parent education programs can be effective, but we do not know what properties of these programs account for their effectiveness.

II. Program Objectives and Foci

The Child and Family Neighborhood Program is an early childhood intervention project designed to improve the development of young children through a focus on the conditions of parent-child relations as well as the process of parent-child relations.[4] The program works with parents of children 0 to 3 years in age. A basic premise of the program is that informal and formal family support systems play a critical role in enabling parents to foster the development of their children. The program gives considerable attention to the ways in which family social networks and neighborhood resources facilitate and support the childrearing functions of parents.

The program utilizes a social interactional perspective of families as educators and socialization agents. Our assumption is that child behavior and development are functions of a number of interconnected social-environment influences which socialize

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[4] The emphasis on the conditions and process of parent-child relations coincides with Bronfenbrenner's (1978) suggestion that parent education programs should deal with the conditions and process of parenthood.

parents into specific patterns of relationships and interaction with their child(ren), and affect a family's ability to cope with normal stress and unusual crises. The family unit is seen as the primary social context of parent-child interaction and child development, with several layers of interdependent social-environment influences interacting with the family system. Of particular interest to this project are the ways in which formal and informal support systems, the social organization of the neighborhood, and community values and norms affect the functioning of families and, in turn, the quality of young children's lives. This program, then, reflects an emerging paradigm in the social sciences and human services which adheres to a socio-ecological perspective of services within a family and community context as contrasted to an individualistic, professional-institutional perspective of services to isolated individuals by a professional in an institutional setting (Schaefer, 1977).

The aims of this project are to strengthen informal and formal family support systems and to increase parents' knowledge of how children develop, giving particular attention to the role of parents in fostering the development of children. The superordinate goal of this experimental program is to improve significantly the social and cognitive functioning and abilities of children.

Attempts to strengthen family support systems are made by enabling parents to form a mutual support system with other parents involved in the program, by encouraging parents to maximize use of their social networks for tapping informal resources, and by facilitating utilization of existing formal human services. The program curriculum stresses interpersonal relations and communication as well as ways to approach and deal with formal institutions and services. By providing parents with knowledge, skills and settings in which to interact with other parents, the program seeks to facilitate the

strengthening of childrearing support systems rather than providing a support system upon which parents become dependent.

Efforts to increase parents' understanding of child development emphasize the reciprocal nature of parent-child interaction, using concrete activities and practical discussions to provide new information about child care development. Program staff attempt to uncover parents' current understandings of child development and utilize these perspectives as a framework for introducing new concepts. The program also has a health education and screening component which seeks to identify developmentally delayed children and provide information about nutrition and general maternal and child health care practices.

The program works with clusters of ten parents and their young children twice weekly in a home-like setting with paraprofessionals as the primary staff persons. The clustering of parents into small groups is integral to the development of mutual support systems of program participants. Parents begin the program when their child is under one year of age, and hopefully remain until the child is three years of age. The bulk of program activity takes place in a community building where several social service programs are based. Plans call for the program to occupy a renovated home (duplex) which is to retain most of its home-like characteristics in the building renovation. A strong intent of the program is to have a non-threatening, informal setting. In designing the program, existing institutional facilities such as school buildings were considered to be places in which potential program participants might feel uncomfortable. The paraprofessional delivery system stems from the program's attempt to have staff members who are culturally compatible with program participants. Staff development is a major program activity.

The program is located in and serves a two- by four-mile community within the Wayne-Westland Community School District in suburban Detroit. Historically the area may be viewed as a contrived community (Suttles, 1972) in that it was constructed during World War II to provide housing for military personnel and civilian workers employed at a nearby bomber factory. It was owned and maintained by the U.S. government until the mid-1950s when it was sold to individual landlords and homeowners. The area also is a defended community (Suttles, 1972) in that it has sharp physical boundaries and within the past 15 years has gained somewhat of a forbidding reputation apparently stemming from a perceived high crime rate and the poor condition of a significant proportion of its housing. About one-half of the community consists of multiple-unit housing complexes (duplex and four-plexes); the quarters are small, usually about 800 square feet of living space.

The 6,060 residents are white and tend to be employed in skilled or semi-skilled occupations that are highly vulnerable to shifts in economic conditions and employment levels. Many residents have familial roots in rural America, generally from Appalachia and the rural Midwest. The mobility rate is exceptionally high, with some families moving in and out of the community several times per year. School achievement is low. On the average, at the end of the sixth grade children in this community are 2.5 grade levels behind national norms in reading and mathematics. Two elementary schools serve the community. Slightly less than one-third of the community is under 18 years of age, and 12.5% is under 5 years. Approximately three-fourths of all households have at least one child under 18 years of age. About fifteen percent of the households are headed by single females. Thirty-five percent of the population 25 years or older has a high school diploma.

A number of human and health services are located within or near the community. A public, university-affiliated hospital is adjacent to the community, and several human service agencies have special programs or neighborhood offices in the community. The City of Westland, in cooperation with the local schools and other services, is in the process of implementing a multi-service agency concept in the community.

The program's concern for neighborhoods and family social networks stems from an interest in how a family's interactions with these social structures affect the stability of family support systems and the development of children. Neighborhoods and family social networks may have a beneficial or adverse influence on a child directly or indirectly through the mediating influence of a parent.

While the premise of this project is that neighborhoods play a potentially critical role in the development of children and in the stability of family functioning, little is known about the influence of neighborhoods on the lives of families and children. Neighborhoods serve as a source of interpersonal influence, a source of mutual aid, a reference group or a context in which individuals influence each other in indirect ways, a status arena, and as an organizational base for formal gatherings and informal voluntary associations (D. Warren, 1975).

The conditions under which resources within neighborhoods are utilized to support family childrearing are not clear. There are data to suggest that a person who is near in physical proximity may not be perceived a resource for help except in emergency situations and after other helpers have been sought (Litwak & Szelenyi, 1969). The social organization of a neighborhood may have a significant influence on family functioning. One study found the type of neighborhood in which one lived to have an effect on the use of other social network ties and professionals in help-seeking behaviors

surrounding mental health issues (R. Warren, 1975). Perhaps the degree to which neighborhood resources are used to help rear children depends upon the kinds and similarities of concerns of neighborhood residents and whether those concerns can be met by resources within the neighborhood (Warren & Warren, 1977).

We envision informal social networks potentially contributing to the strength of family support systems and the development of children through two significant roles. First, social networks may serve directly as family support systems, providing help during crises, aiding in the care of children, and dispensing information and advice. It appears that persons living in crisis conditions rely heavily on primary social network systems for support. An important study by Stack (1974) found social networks to be an exceedingly important support system for low-income blacks. Cochran and Brassard (in press) have suggested that members of a parent's social network influence parents and, in turn, children by providing emotional and material assistance, encouraging or discouraging particular patterns of parent-child interaction, and serving as role models.

Second, social networks function as mediating and referral systems which may influence in a major way a family's use of and relationship to formal human services. For instance, studies have found utilization of formal health care services to be influenced by characteristics of an individual's social network. Freidson (1960) found the procedure of seeking medical help to involve an intricate network of lay consultants, each of whom assisted in diagnosing the health symptom and prescribing treatment or making referral to another informal or formal source. Social networks also have been found to be related to utilization of prenatal care services (McKinlay, 1973) and use of Family Service Agency services (Kammeyer & Bolton, 1968).

There also is a practical consideration in the program's interest in social networks and neighborhoods. As financial resources become increasingly scarce for the human services, designers of social service programs and policies are examining seriously the ways informal support systems and mutual helping patterns can supplement and, in some cases, substitute for formal human services (Caplan & Killilea, 1976; Sarason, Carrol, Maton, Cohen & Lorentz, 1977).

The nature of the organizational sponsorship of this program contributes to the saliency of this project. A powerful combination of research and program practice perspectives and expertise can result from a collaborative relationship between a public school system and an institution of higher education. The involvement of a public school in a parent-oriented 0 to 3 early intervention program is particularly noteworthy. Increasingly there are suggestions that public schools should become major delivery systems for social services and early education (e.g. Hobbs, 1978), and yet there are a number of reservations about the adaptability and responsiveness of schools to the needs of parents and very young children. For instance, the flexibility of public schools in carrying out early intervention programs has been questioned (Lazar, et al., 1977) and the fear of schools "co-opting" parents through parent education has been voiced (e.g. Farber & Lewis, 1975). Clearly there are a number of organization behavior issues, including the social distance between parents and teachers, that public schools must address in implementing and operating parent education programs (Powell, 1978b). Determining the appropriate institutional delivery system for parent-oriented early education is a complex issue that this program touches in ways other than the involvement of a public school system. Questions must be raised, for example, about a community's accommodation to a new neighborhood-based entity sponsored by familiar (school) and relatively unfamiliar (university) agencies.

III. Evaluation Strategy

The evaluation component of the Child and Family Neighborhood Program is designed to transcend the question "Is this program effective?" by examining relationships between program operations and the functioning of families and their young children. Our approach to evaluation assumes that the program and families it serves are independent social systems with their own properties, values and modes of operation. Assuming reciprocal influences between program and families, an important question is what happens when these two systems intersect. In what ways do family circumstances and parental characteristics influence program operations and parental experiences in the program? Conversely, in what ways do program properties affect parent-child interaction, parental attitudes toward childrearing and everyday family functioning?

The evaluation design is based on a skeptical view of the notion that evaluations of intensive educational and human service programs can be reduced to linear causal relationships. Our premise is that a circular feedback system may best represent interconnected family-child-program influences (Fein, in press). Our evaluation strategy, then, is expected to yield an understanding of how parent education program operations are influenced by family characteristics and, in turn, how program operations affect child and family functioning.

The evaluation strategy has two major aims. The first intent is to develop an explanation of anticipated variation in program outcome indices of child and family functioning by investigating relations between parents' program experiences and changes in child and family behavior. The evaluation design calls for a careful analysis of parents' experiences in the program, and an examination of linkages between different types of parent experiences and changes in child and family functioning. The second

aim is to investigate expected variations in parents' program experiences in relation to program properties (i.e. staff attributes) and parent/family characteristics. It is anticipated the evaluation findings will have significant implications for the design of early intervention and parent education programs, the training of staff and further research.

The evaluation design was shaped considerably by the Goodson and Hess (1975) finding that it is not clear what factors account for the effectiveness of parent education programs. This work led to the decision to carry out a microscopic analysis of program operations in an effort to identify significant program properties that influence parent and child functioning. The evaluation strategy also was influenced by our strong interest in the possible impact of differences in family circumstances and parent experience in the program on program operations and parent/child outcomes. Parents approach intervention programs with differing needs, stresses and existing resources. Little is known about the influence of parent attributes and family circumstances on program effectiveness (Chilman, 1973), although the Kessen and Fein (1975) find study discussed earlier suggests that family social networks serve to mediate program effects in a major way. In regard to parental involvements with the program, we assume that parents will vary in types of experiences. Program staff, for example, cannot be expected to be uniformly enthusiastic, energetic and perceptive with each parent (Boruch & Gomez, 1977).

The research evaluation field generally has neglected the issue of how programs actually function.[5] For example, a 1975 study found that approximately one-fourth of

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[5] In intervention studies there have been exceptions to this statement. Stallings (1975) and Miller & Dyer (1975) have made important efforts to investigate processes of child intervention programs.

U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare evaluations did not include the measurement of program process (Bernstein & Freeman, 1975). Overwhelming emphasis has been given to program outcomes, with the many diverse dimensions of a program lumped together as one causal treatment variable.[6] Hence, what is generally referred to as process or formative evaluation is underdeveloped conceptually and methodologically.

Perhaps the most significant limitation of current process evaluation work is a conceptual one. Process or formative evaluation usually is undertaken to verify the fidelity of the program plan. That is, process evaluators seek to determine whether the program has been directed at the appropriate target population and whether the intervention efforts have been carried out as specified in the program design or derived from principles explicated in the design (Bernstein & Freeman, 1975). Formative evaluation also is suggested as a mechanism for objective feedback on program operations so that program managers can alter and refine operations while in progress (Anderson & Ball, 1977; Palmer, Glick & Cazden, 1971). While these are important functions of process evaluation, we would argue that process evaluation can play a potentially significant role in uncovering the determinants of program effectiveness. The measurement of program processes can yield insightful understandings of the social processes that affect program operations and the interconnections between specific program properties and the outcomes and experiences of participants.

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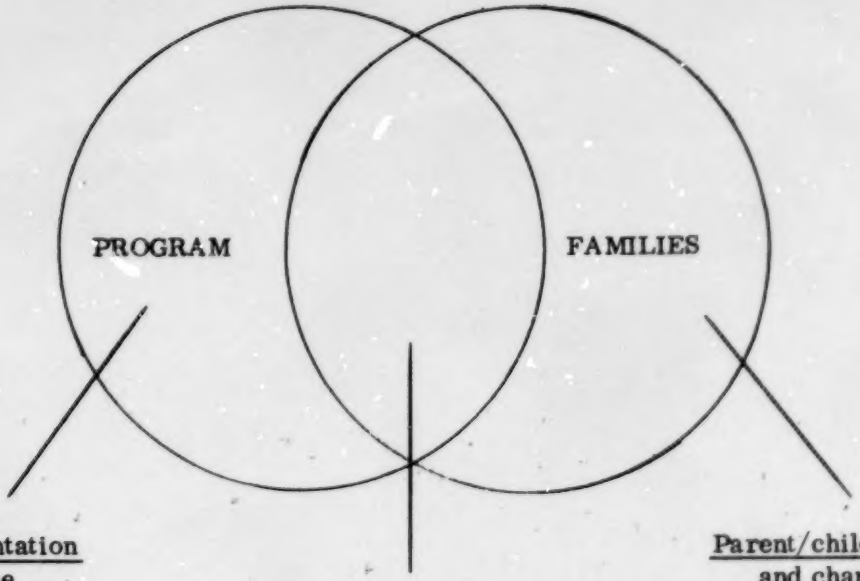
[6] Zimiles (1977) argues that serious methodological limitations prevent a precise, comprehensive assessment of program impact, and that the primary method of evaluating early childhood programs should be to describe in considerable detail what they consist of and how they operate, and then hypothesize, on the basis of a theoretical framework, how a given program will affect children.

This program's evaluation approach necessitates methodologies and practices which vary from conventional program evaluation efforts. A first requirement is that evaluation measures must be highly sensitive to program process variables and to indices of family-parent-child change. Experimental evaluations tend to suffer from partial irrelevance of the response (or outcome) variable and degradation of the treatment variable (Sigel, 1975, 1978; Boruch & Gomez, 1977), and only through carefully refined instrumentation can these problems be remedied. This evaluation strategy also requires the utilization of descriptive ethnographic data gathering techniques in concert with systematic psychological and sociological measures; in other words, a combination of "soft" and "hard" data. Increasingly the benefits of ethnographic analyses of educational environments are being recognized (e.g. Wilson, 1977), and strategies have been suggested for integrating quantitative and qualitative data (Pelto & Gretel, 1973; Sieber, 1973). A third requirement of this evaluation design is a close working relationship between evaluation and program staff. It is questionable whether objectivity results from the traditional organizational independence of evaluators from the action group (e.g. Freeman, 1977), and in this program structural arrangements have been made to enable a healthy flow of information from program staff to evaluators without violating conventional social research rules.

The evaluation strategy for this program falls into three areas: program refinement and maintenance; program-parent-child interaction; and parent-child characteristics and change. Variables under investigation within each of these areas are discussed below and listed in Figure 1.

Program refinement and maintenance has to do with factors contributing to the development and operations of the intervention program. When new settings or organizational entities are created a variety of social processes influence the character of



Program implementation and maintenance

Professional socialization and staff roles
Relations with community
Relation to existing human and educational services

Parent-child-program interactions

Group meeting dynamics
Parent-parent relations
Parent-staff relations

Parent/child characteristics and change

Family and friendship network composition and contact frequency
Family stress and coping strategies
Parent help-seeking behaviors re: childrearing
Mother-infant interaction
Maternal childrearing beliefs
Use of neighborhood resources

Figure 1 -- Evaluation strategy areas

program services (Sarason, 1972). Three processes are under evaluation in the Child and Family Neighborhood Program. First, the ways in which the program adapts to and accommodates the subculture of the community in which it is based is of keen interest. Parent education is an ideologically tense business (Brim, 1959) and the degree to which it enhances or disrupts the transmission of cultural characteristics through parent-child relations is a crucial early intervention issue (Horowitz & Paden, 1973). Second, the professional socialization of program staff, especially paraprofessional workers, and the roles that staff assume vis-a-vis one another and parents are central to the development and maintenance of this intervention program. Our interests here encompass the issues of professional identity, staff-family boundaries, and the interpersonal skills required of paraprofessionals working with small groups of parents. A third dimension of program refinement and maintenance is the relationship of this program to existing educational and human services in the community, including various operations of the project's co-sponsoring public school. Parent education provides a potentially competitive entry into the territorial network of human services offered by public and private nonschool agencies, and a program that deals with the social milieu of parents can be expected to infringe upon child and family services provided by other human service agencies. A related issue is that of organizational penetration; that is, the degree to which this program becomes institutionalized into the basic operation of its co-sponsoring agencies (Powell, 1978b).

The interactions of program-parent-child deal with operational aspects of the program. These interactions have to do with program process, structure and content.[7]

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[7] The distinctions between program process, structure and content were suggested to me by Edna Shapiro of Bank Street College.

Under examination are social-psychological dimensions of parent group meetings, with specific attention to instructional/leadership styles and the roles and integration of individual parents into group meetings; and parent-staff relations within and outside of program operations. The overall aim is to define and describe operational components of the program, and to analyze the development and nature of interpersonal relationships associated with each component.

The indices of program effectiveness and individual differences among parents fall within the evaluation domain of parent/child characteristics and change. The following are under evaluation: parental social networks (kin, friend and neighbor interaction); life events stress; everyday family coping; parent help-seeking behaviors surrounding child care issues; maternal childrearing attitudes; and mother-infant interaction.

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